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**Historical Dictionary
of
MAURITIUS**

second edition

Sydney Selvon

Historical Dictionary of MAURITIUS

second edition

by
Sydney Selvon

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EDITOR'S FOREWORD

Mauritius is not one of Africa's oldest independent states nor certainly is it one of the biggest or most important. Yet it is one of the most successful, and for that it deserves credit. Originally based largely on agriculture and tourism, its economy has been doing reasonably well and an industrial sector has been created. It also boasts an effective democracy with a lively multiparty system which permitted the transfer of power to the opposition, quite a rare phenomenon on the continent.

That is not bad for a country that consists of a relatively small island and some quite tiny ones and whose population only arrived in successive waves over the past three centuries. In fact, it is quite good when one considers that the population is very mixed ethnically, culturally, and with regard to class. A successful multiracial society is one of the most crucial achievements in Africa, where ethnic and religious differences all too often prevail over the bonds people have in common.

This means that, despite its size, the world will be hearing more of Mauritius. It is already on the map of tourist locations. It is also attracting more investment due to its export processing zones. It has gained attention through an active role in the Organization of African Unity and other bodies. But the country is still too poorly known abroad. A member of the British Commonwealth, yet with a solid francophone tradition, it has a culture distinctive from all its former colonial masters and its people are a unique combination.

This Mauritius volume in the series of African Historical Dictionaries goes a long way toward introducing the country, delving into its history in surprising detail and with obvious affection for those who have contributed to its advance. The book reviews the many ethnic and cultural strands that must blend to create the sort of society Mauritians desire. Additionally, it tells us what the country has to offer its own citizens and others.

That this completely new and up-to-date volume accomplishes these goals so effectively can probably be traced to the fact that its author knows the country so well. A journalist, historian, and briefly an elected official, Sydney Selvon is most familiar as the editor-in-

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Introduction

Contemporary written records exist for all periods of Mauritian history. Since the foundation of the Mauritian nation dates back to European colonization, several original documents are to be found in European archives, especially in the Netherlands, France, and Great Britain, although a good number are also available in Mauritius, at the Mauritius Archives, Coromandel, Mauritius, while very interesting reading material and other documents can be found at the Carnegie Library, Curepipe; the Municipal Library of Port Louis; and the Mauritius Institute, Port-Louis, Mauritius. Other pertinent written records and publications can be found in South Africa, India, Australia, Madagascar, Réunion Island, and the Seychelles, countries which have had close historical ties with Mauritius.

The two best references for an exhaustive bibliography of Mauritius are the following books: Auguste Toussaint and H. Adolphe's *Bibliography of Mauritius. 1502-1954. Covering the Printed Record, Manuscripts, Archivalia and Cartographic Material*. Port-Louis, 1956; and the *Annual Reports* of the Archives Department available at the Mauritius Archives, Coromandel, Mauritius, covering the period from 1955 to date. These two references are very detailed and well documented and the information contained is meticulously classified so as to best facilitate research.

The following three books are recommended for the reader who wants to gain an overall knowledge of Mauritian history from its very beginnings to date:

BISSOONDOYAL, U., ed. *Indians Overseas. The Mauritian Experience*. A collection of papers presented at a conference in 1984 at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Moka, Mauritius.

BISSOONDOYAL, U. and SERVANSING, S.B.C., eds. *Slavery in South West Indian Ocean*. A collection of papers presented at a conference from February 26 and March 2, 1985, at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Moka, Mauritius.

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Toussaint's book is a work of a general nature whereas the two collections of papers presented at conferences at the Mahatma Ghandi Institute provide, a detailed historical account of most aspects of the enormous and vital contribution of the slaves and the coolies—who were transported to Mauritius from Africa and Asia—to the shaping of the Mauritian nation of which their descendants constitute at least 90 percent of Mauritius' population.

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